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## Christian Best-Sellers

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True, in the first Christian centuries there was no Fleet Street in a Rome, Athens, or Alexandria, where one could listen to the muffled roar of presses turning out the best-sellers—the novels, whose modern counterparts, as genially yet penetratingly described by a late English journalist, discuss “what an essential lunatic will do in a dull world.”

But best-sellers there were, pagan and Christian both. The pagan romances which preceded the type we are concerned with appealed as much, if not more, to the lower classes as to the higher. A great deal more did the Christian best-sellers about the lunatics for God hold the attentive eyes of numberless readers.

But with regard to the early Christian best-sellers, the stories of sainted men of the Church, a sharp distinction must be kept in mind between them and the pagan *Wundergeschichte*, and the distinction is one of final cause. The late Professor Edward K. Rand almost entirely recognized this when he states, remarking on St. Jerome and his *Lives of the Hermit Saints*, that these *vitae* show “that a great scholar like St. Jerome could *condescend* [italics mine] to write popular novels, or rather short stories, not that he coveted mention among the authors of the best sellers of the day—though that distinction was forced upon him—but rather that he had anticipated St. Gregory’s idea of giving Christian readers something safe and Christian to read, and something as exciting as Pagans had in Greek Romances. There was also . . . the higher purpose of making the life of asceticism attractive” (*Founders of the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1928. 124-125).<sup>1</sup>

The last sentence smacks of afterthought, while “condescends” indicates the difficulty of keeping on the straight and narrow in that cloudland of Primary and Secondary Purpose. For the primary purpose of the Christian best-sellers differs completely from that of the pagan romances.<sup>2</sup> It may be best understood, perhaps, from the introduction to Athanasius’ *Life of St. Anthony* (in the Latin version of Evagrius):

... ut ad eius aemulationem atque exemplum vos instituere possitis, magna cum laetitia suscepi vestrae charitatis imperium. Etenim mihi ingens lucrum est atque utilitas hoc ipsum quod recordeo Antonii, et vos cum admiratione audientes, scio eius propositum cupere sectari: perfecta est siquidem ad virtutem via, Antonium scire quis fuerit.

Jerome, in the Prologue to his *Vita Sancti Hilarionis*, writes: “. . . invoco Spiritum Sanctum ut qui illi virtutes largitus est, mihi ad narrandas eas sermonem tribuat, ut

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted with permission.

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Gerould, in his *Saints’ Legends* (Boston, 1916), p. 15, calls them an excellent substitute for fiction, but declares that they were more than fiction.

facta dictis exaequantur,” hardly a condescending attitude, even though the words represent only a “stock” introduction.

The primary purpose behind these early *vitae* was simply “edification” in its most inclusive meaning. Certainly, too, they served the secondary purpose of providing for Christians stimulating and interesting reading, and in this, to be sure, hardly failed to reach as high a water mark of popularity as the pagan romances. Of Jerome’s *Lives*, for example, some 500 Latin manuscripts, some 230 Greek, have been listed.

Not only in Greece and Rome did the enthusiasm for Saints’ Lives flame. A mere ten years after Jerome wrote his *Life of St. Paul the First Hermit*, some find a cult of that Saint established at Oxyrhynchus on the Nile, indicating very possibly that the Life had already been translated into Coptic.

Sulpicius Severus has, in one of his *Dialogues* (1.23), an interesting comment on how eagerly the early Christians seized upon this new literary type:

I will relate to you to what places that book (the *Vita Sancti Martini*) has penetrated, and how there is almost no spot upon earth in which the subject of so happy a history is not possessed as a well known narrative. Paulinus . . . was the first to bring it to the city of Rome; and then, as it was greedily laid hold of by the whole city, I saw the booksellers rejoicing over it, inasmuch as nothing was a source of greater gain to them, for nothing commanded a readier sale, or fetched a higher price. This same book, having got a long way before me in the course of my travelling, was already generally read through all Carthage, when I came into Africa. Only that presbyter of Cyrene . . . did not possess it; but he wrote down its contents from my description. And why should I speak about Alexandria? for there it is almost better known to all than it is to yourself. It has passed through Egypt, Nitria, the Thebaid, and the whole of the regions of Memphis. I found it being read by a certain old man in the desert. . . . This commission was given me both by him and many other brethren, that . . . I should constrain you to supply those particulars which you stated in your book you had passed over respecting the virtues of the sainted man. (Tr. by A. Roberts, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 11 (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894). 35).

Into the far reaches of Syria, Arabia, Armenia, and Ethiopia it filtered with amazing success. Its conquering march extended well into modern times.

To trace the history of the spread of the various lives would require many more pages than this essay might hope to include, however benevolent the editor toward a dry subject, but so dry only because the dust has lain so long undisturbed. To scatter some of it, not to refurbish the type, is our hope in briefly sketching, in broadest outlines, the very delimited subject of collections of saints’ legends over the centuries.

By the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries, the collection known as the *Vitae Patrum*, wrongly attributed to Jerome as late as the fifteenth century, was assembled. It consists, in part, of lives of Egyptian ascetics, some originally written in Latin, others translated into that tongue from Greek. Generally speaking, the *Vitae Patrum* may be called

the prototype of all compilations of saints' legends,<sup>3</sup> and were included in the list of books recommended for Christians in the *Pseudo-Decretum Gelasianum*.

What are known as "historical martyrologies" (liturgical calendars, with long or short notices on the saints), e.g., those of Venerable Bede, Florus of Lyon, Rabanus Maurus, Ado of Vienna, Notker of St. Gall, even the metrical martyrology of Wandelbert of Pruem, drew upon the *Vitae Patrum*. And from these martyrologies the great legendaries took their origin, culminating in such immensely influential works as the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, the *Sanctuarium* of Mombritius, the *Nova Legenda Angliae*, and Bernard Gui's *Sanctoral*.

Religious poems and treatises, although not strictly collections of saints' lives, but including many accounts in brief form, soon came to be written: Prudentius' *Peristephanon*, the influential *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, the Spanish martyr accounts of Eulogius of Corduba, Gregory of Tours' *De Gloria Martyrum* and *De Gloria Confessorum*, Flodoard of Reims' *De Triumphis Christi Sanctorumque Palaestinae*, *De Triumphis Christi Antiochiae Gestis*, and *De Christi Triumphis apud Italiam*.

Many of the great preachers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as Jacques de Vitry, employed a great number of *exempla*, illustrative stories, in their sermons, so that these sermons indirectly are collections of saints' lives, since many of the *exempla* are simply lives or anecdotes of the saints.

Collections of *exempla* for the use of preachers, culled from the sermons of the famous preachers, or simply compiled from the original sources, were drawn up, and these, too, frequently amounted in part to nothing more than *Lives of the Saints*. Two well-known collections of this type are those of Etienne de Bourbon and Peraldus in the thirteenth century.

We may briefly consider some collections in the vernacular. In England, Aelfric had early written his metrical *Lives of the Saints* (996-997). There followed the *South English Legendary*, Osbern Bokenham's *Lives of the Saints* and the *Legend of Holy Women*, John Barbour's collection in 33,500 lines, the *Festial* of John Mirk, numerous translations of the *Legenda Aurea*, to mention a few, culminating perhaps in Caxton's *Golden Legend*. Finally Buckland's *Lives of Women Saints*, Nicholas Roscarock's *Lives of English Saints*, together with Alban Butler's famous compilation and the English translations of the work of the Spanish hagiographers, Villegas and Ribadeneira, and a rendering of the *Roman Martyrology* by Keynes in 1627, preceded Cardinal Newman's *Lives of the English Saints*, when hagiography regained some of the dignity it had lost in the time of the Reformation.

In France, Vauchier le Denain's French translation of the *Vitae Patrum* and the metrical *Vie des Anciens Pères* are, perhaps, the most important early hagiographic collections.

The *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais, a favorite reference book of the later Middle Ages, sadly in need of a new, critical edition, contains much biographical material garnered from the *Vitae Patrum*.

Numerous French legendaries, existing still in manu-

script form only, engaged the attention of the learned Paul Meyer for many years.

A good many translations exist of the *Legenda Aurea*, the most well known of which was made by Jean de Vignay (1348), itself turned again into French.

We have already mentioned the Latin collection of Bernard Gui. Among others are the *Sanctilogia* of Guy de Chatres, Abbot of St. Denis about the middle of the fourteenth century, and Jean Gielemans (d. 1487) Prior of Dunes; the compilations of Gilles of Damme and William of Cahors.

At least eighteen French translations (printed) of the *Vitae Patrum* take us down to the seventeenth century, when the scholar Ruinart initiated his attempts at sifting the genuine *Acta Martyrum*, Michael Angelo Marin compiled *Les Vies des Peres des Deserts*, followed by such collectors as Claude Peter Goujet, Arnauld d'Andilly, and Gourgoing de Villefore.

Dutch and Flemish presses produced both Latin and vernacular editions of the *Vitae Patrum*, the legendaries of a Corssendonck and Geens; while in Spain, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the works of Ribadeneira and Villegas went through many editions.

The most well-known German hagiographic collections are the *Passional* and the *Väterbuch*.

The *Passional*, consisting of 100,000 verses, of unknown authorship, compiled about 1300, drew chiefly upon the *Legenda Aurea*. Other prose *Passionals* and *Legendaries* exist still in manuscript form.

The *Väterbuch*, compiled about 1280, comprises 41,540 verses, based on the *Vitae Patrum* and the *Legenda Aurea*.

The *Märtyrbuch*, similar to the *Passional*, drawing also on Jacobus de Voragine's collection, but of inferior poetic quality, was written about the same time. The first prose *Legendarium* was composed about 1349 by Hermann von Fritslar. Printed prose legendaries, chief among which was that from Augsburg, 1471, followed at short intervals.

Ehrismann, in his history of medieval German literature, has made some attempt at listing manuscripts preserving German legendaries, yet many lack editing.

In the sixteenth century Peter Cratepol and Adam Walasser published collections of lives of national saints. But, for a study of hagiographic collections in Germany, the reader is referred to Friedrich Wilhelm's *Deutsche Legenden und Legendare* (1907).

So, too, in the case of hugely industrious Ireland, one need only consult the admirable catalogue of Irish hagiography, prepared for the Bollandists by Charles Plummer, to acquaint himself with the numerous Irish compilations.

From Italy came two of the most famous medieval compilers, already named: Jacobus de Voragine and Boninus Mombritius. Less well known are Peter Calo (fl. 1330) and Bartholomew of Trent (fl. 1294). Chief among those who assembled vernacular collections is Domenico Cavalea, whose work has gone through many editions. Space does not remain to list the innumerable writers of *Vite de' Santi*, many of whom concerned themselves simply with single cities or provinces of Italy.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, of course, had made a collection (no longer extant) of *acta martyrum*. Only his "Palestinian Martyrs" remains.

One must not lose sight that throughout all the centuries in all countries, both Latin and vernacular Lives of individual Saints were written in unbelievable numbers, and that printed editions of the Latin *Vitae Patrum* multiplied one upon another.

But the mere listing above of the collections gives sufficient indication of the perennial popularity of these best-sellers. Through them the history of the Church, and its course in peril, and strife and peace, runs like a skein of silver, illuminating for the modern reader, but inspiring too, just as to the reader of the past, exhorted, for example, by words like these from Alban Butler's eighteenth-century English collection of *Vitae*, more than worth repeating:

As in corporal distempers a total loss of appetite which no medicine can restore, forebodes certain decay and death, so in the spiritual life of the soul a neglect or disrelish of pious reading and instruction is a most fatal symptom. . . . No less criminal and dangerous is the disposition of those who misspend their precious moments in reading romances and play-books, which fill the mind with a worldly spirit, with a love of vanity, pleasure, idleness and trifling, which destroy and lay waste all the generous sentiments of virtue in the heart, and sow there the seeds of every vice, which extend their baneful roots over the whole soil. Who seeks nourishment from poisons? What food is to the body, that our thoughts and reflections are to the mind; by them the affections of the soul are nourished.

The chameleon changes its colour as it is affected by sadness, anger or joy; or by the colour upon which it sits; and we see an insect borrow its lustre and hue from the plant or leaf upon which it feeds. In like manner what our meditations and affections are, such will our souls become, either holy and spiritual, or earthly and carnal. By pious reading the mind is instructed and enlightened, and the affections of the heart are purified and inflamed. . . .

The world is a whirlpool of business, pleasure and sin. Its torrent is always beating upon the heart, ready to break in. . . . The more deeply a person is immersed in its tumultuous cares, so much the greater ought to be his solicitude to find leisure to breathe . . . and by pious reading, to afford his soul some spiritual reflection, as the wearied husbandman, returning from his labour, recruits his spent vigour and exhausted strength, by allowing his body necessary refreshments and repose.

To the student and teacher of Latin literature for whom the *Nachleben* of a type must have significance, the history of Christian biography, transmitting Suetonian and Plutarchian traditions, has all too long remained unappreciated. Its vast reaches over time and space, from the hot sands of the Thebaid where Decius' bloody fingers reached, to the misted English shores of Newman, harbor a continuity and scope at once meaningful and capable of penetrating enlargement.

### Turning Things to Use

By JAMES E. MALONE, S.J.  
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One of the fundamental rules of good teaching is, to quote Professor Laurie, formerly of Edinburgh University, to turn things to use. This is especially applicable to the teaching of language. Young people, as a class, are not fond of abstractions, to say the least, but they do like action.

If Caesar, for instance, is being read in class, the teacher can go through his second book of *The Gallic War* over the same ground as our fellow Americans covered in World War I. Strategy can be compared with strategy, weapons with weapons. The teacher may say, for instance: Cum bellum Germanos inter Gallosque exarsisset, Statuum Foederatorum Americae cives crebris

rumoribus ephemeridibusque (or diariisque) certiores fiebant Germanos torpedinibus naves deprimere multosque viros, mulieres, pueros perire. His nuntiis commotus Woodrovius Wilson, qui tum reipublicae praeerat, cum prius Germanos admonuisset ne naves vectonibus transmarinae submergerent, tandem navi Lusitania depressa, non diutius dubitandum existimavit, quin rem ad Senatum deferret bellumque Germanis denuntiaret.

Brevi compertum est et quibus copiis Americani Sociis subsidio esse possent et quid ipsi bello valerent. Intellegebant enim nostri quantopere suae ipsorum patriae interesset bellandi nimis studiosos e Germanis interire, ne, si victores evasissent, Foederatis Americae Civitatibus bellum inferrent totiusque orbis terrarum imperium obtinerent. Celerius etiam omnium opinione visum est multis magnisque proeliis non tantum quid possent Americani, sed etiam quid auderent. Quattuor iam annos in Gallia Septentrionali acerrime a Germanis contra foederatos Gallorum Britannorumque exercitus pugnatum est, ne quid dicam de iis qui apud exteras etiam nationes terra marique atque e caelo etiam bellabant. Hos labores cum neutri diutius sustinere possent nisi et subsidia submitterentur et domesticae rei frumentariae copiae externis etiam cumulerentur, Germani omni ope contendebant, ut res ad exitum duceretur prius quam Americani parati essent in eius belli societatem pervenire.

Or, in comment on the characteristics of World War I: Per aera celeritate incredibili volabant, et caelo hostium munimenta, copias, itinera explorabant, proelium in aere committebant, avium ingentium instar in hostes aeronautas impetu velocissimo deferebantur, ut descendere eos cogerent vel deciderent ex alto. Neque minus erant arma nova atque mira.

Inde factum est ut hoc bellum, si non diuturnitate longissimum, at certe et loco maxime dispersum et crudelitate immanissimum et hominum caede rerumque omnium interitu perniciosissimum, post hominum memoriam existeret.

Quibus rebus vehementer commoti, homines ubique terrarum id agunt ut bella iam procul ab hominum societate amandentur. Quod si non erunt assecuti, id certe valde optandum est ut controversiarum dirimendarum causa rarissime ad arma concurratur.

### The Odes of Horace

A swirl of frost from far Soracte's snows,  
And white spume streaming from a ship of Tyre;  
Dark cypress sentinels that guard a choir  
Of silent tombs; and cliffs a seawind blows.

Here tarries late the blossom of the rose;  
Here sweetly sounds Alcaeus' golden lyre.  
Low hangs the slender moon's reflected fire,  
And cool Bandusia's murmuring water flows.

But lovelier still, with beauty unadorned,  
Are Pyrrha's locks, pressed back with careless ease;  
Or daughter fairer than her mother fair;  
Or Lydia, beloved though onetime scorned,  
Now ready twice to die; yet none of these  
With Lalage's sweet laughter can compare.

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# The Classical Bulletin

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## Editorial

In commenting in the March issue on the ASTP methods of language-teaching and what they have to offer to the Latin-teacher of the present time, we touched on some differences of objectives. The ASTP aimed at giving the student a tool to work with; the Latin-teacher aims at developing the student himself and all his faculties in a liberal way. The latter could mean that the student would leave school without having acquired even one mechanical skill or any immediate preparation for entering business. But it must mean that he has acquired the principles needed for guiding himself to doing things correctly and efficiently, and, above all, for living life in the noble way that befits the *animal rationale a Deo creatum*.

No one is born to be a lathe-operator, or clerical secretary, or teacher of Latin. But every *animal rationale* is born to develop his powers so that they may attain as far as possible their own individual objectives to the extent that these contribute to the accomplishment of the higher objectives of his personality as a whole. An example of the lack of this subordination in objectives would be the physically perfect athlete with a mind lying fallow, or the money-mad and money-gorged genius who knows not how to live. No, no one is born to be even a Latin-teacher! The Latin-teacher, like the lathe-operator and the secretary, is using his chosen work as an avenue leading to his over-all goal—the fullest possible living, which is not the activity of one or several of his powers, but the activity of them all, so coordinated as to conduce to the highest good of his whole being.

Since the world was created by an intelligent Being, is intelligently organized, and has ends to be worked towards intelligently, principles must be the guides in the choices that man's free will makes. Otherwise we have the anomaly of an intelligent being, made by an intelligence, but acting in a haphazard and unintelligent way. And how does education today propose to eliminate the haphazard from the present and future lives of students?

One educational theorist proclaims as ideal the realistic reproduction in the classroom of the circumstances of later life, so that the teacher can, as it were, lead his students across the "stage" and demonstrate the appropriate behavior under these and every other definite set of circumstances. According to this ideal, in twelve or sixteen years of schooling the student can demand a separate demonstration for each of the circumstances which may arise hourly in life's subsequent fifty years with their 365 days of sixteen waking hours each!

It would surely be much simpler to teach the relatively few principles involved in a world and a life which are constructed on principles. That, however, would re-

quire a little work on the part of the student. It would hardly suit the proponents of painless education. It would leave no time for superficial interest methods that never come to grips with an idea or problem, and leave man's strong reasoning faculty in a prolonged infancy. It might mean that the graduate will know fewer mere facts about civilization; but he will know more about why man lived as he did, why he responded as he did to influences from within and from without, and why his civilization rose here and fell there. In a word, he will know more principles, and he will have assessed not only their intrinsic goodness or badness, but also their practical worth in the light of what they have brought to man—perfection or degradation. And knowing the principles, he will be fully prepared for the laboratory period of life after graduation and is not likely to have a haphazard—"unprincipled"—concoction in the laboratory explode in his face.

Latin can be a strong factor in the communication to the student of these principles and their application. But the methods used by the ASTP are not effective for a liberal education. When the ability to converse in the foreign language has been acquired, the ASTP objective has been reached. But it is only the dilute logic of conversational language that is understood; the genius of the language is unplumbed, and hence the genius of the corresponding civilization remains unplumbed. The mere facts of a civilization—also part of the ASTP content—give only a superficial knowledge of it. It is only when the student has penetrated into the mind of the people using a language that he can come really to understand their civilization. Their mind can best be entered through their language, and not only their conversational, but their literary, language. Their habits of thought are best revealed in their habits of expression, and when both their thought and their expression are at the highest level.

But all this will bring a little sweat to the Latin-student's brow. He will have, with effort, to "pry" into the foreign mind. His "pony" will be found to reveal the Roman mind in a very superficial way. His Latin class will perhaps supply fewer facts which he can use also in history class. He will have less of the type of broadening that comes painlessly in putting together cardboard Roman houses. His interest will be aroused and sustained less easily. The teacher will have to probe in the student's mind to establish contact with his imperfectly formed ideas, and then foster their growth and beauty. But—and here is our dream—as the drops of sweat fall, there will arise a vision of beauty. And the pain of the travail will be forgotten. For the flesh-and-blood student that sits in front of us Latin-teachers is born with a genuine appetite for the true, the good, the beautiful.

... debemus ... quaecumque ex diversa lectione congestimus, separare, melius enim distincta servantur, deinde adhibita ingenii nostri cura et facultate in unum saporem varia illa libamenta confundere, ut etiam si apparuerit, unde sumptum sit, aliud tamen esse quam unde sumptum est, appareat. Quod in corpore nostro videmus sine ulla opera nostra facere naturam: alimenta, quae accepimus, quamdiu in sua qualitate perdurant et solida innatant stomacho, onera sunt; at cum ex eo, quod erant, mutata sunt, tum demum in vires et in sanguinem transeunt. Idem in his, quibus aluntur ingenia, praestemus, ut quaecumque hausimus, non patiamur integra esse, ne aliena sint. Concoquamus illa; alioqui in memoriam ibunt, non in ingenium. Adsentiamur illis fideliter et nostra faciamus, ut unum quiddam fiat ex multis. ... —Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* 84.5-7.

### Modern Musical Comedy and Aristophanes

By PATRICK A. SULLIVAN, S.J.

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The most successful dramatic form of entertainment today is the modern musical comedy. *Oklahoma* and *Carousel* during this past year enjoyed long runs on Broadway. With their gay and gorgeous costumes, with their enchanting settings and their medley of harmonious music, musical comedies assure their audiences a delightful evening. Their fanciful and fantastic plots, their subtle satire and their lively humor make musical comedies a recreational and artistic treasure of great price.

Most people believe that this type of drama began in the "gay nineties" with Gilbert and Sullivan. Not many know that five hundred years before the Christian Era musical comedy had already won its way into the hearts of a whole country. We have lost the musical scores of these comedies, though we know from other sources that they had fine music. Some of the texts of the dialogues and plots are extant.

Aristophanes was the composer of these first musical comedies, and his plays, like those of Gilbert and Sullivan, of Kaufman and Gershwin, are packed with beauty, humor, music and satire. His catchy songs and delightful lyrics were repeated on the streets as the moderns hum the latest numbers on the hit-parade program. Aristophanes, like the moderns, held up to ridicule the evils and shortcomings of institutions and people, and attempted to laugh out of existence the silly practices of everyday life.

A comparison of Aristophanes with the two most famous teams of musical dramatists will show concretely how small is the gap between ancient and modern musical comedy. Just before the turn of the century and under the management of a clever producer, two Englishmen, W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan, turned out a series of musical and satirical masterpieces that even today have not lost their worldwide popularity. *Trial by Jury*, *Pinafore*, *The Mikado*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, with the words and enchanting lyrics by Gilbert and the simple sparkling melodies by Sullivan, are too well known to require further description. But this remarkable pair have much in common with Aristophanes.

Gilbert appears to have read Aristophanes, as appears in *The Pirates of Penzance* where we read, "I know the croaking chorus from the Frogs of Aristophanes." Their *Trial by Jury*, a light and subtle satire on English law courts, reminds one at once of Aristophanes' satire on Athenian law courts, *The Wasps*.

In his comedy Gilbert slyly censures the prejudices and ignorance of the English judges and juries of his day. His judge and jury, ignorant of the law, but completely convinced of the beautiful plaintiff's innocence, join in a song that sums up their legal bias, "from bias be free, from every kind of bias be free; but that ruffianly defendant you needn't mind." The English law courts of 1850 were apparently no different from those of Athens in 450 B.C. Aristophanes packs the prejudices and ignorance of Greek judges and juries in the humorous picture he paints of the dicast who swoons because for the first time in his life he freed a defendant. The gay *Pinafore* with its frank caricature of a newspaper

publisher's appointment to be first Lord of the Admiralty reminds one of the *Knights* with its caricature of Cleon the Tanner, the newly elected leader of Athens.

The *Princess Ida*, with its chorus of maidens who regard men as their inferiors and as incapable of ruling a country, catches the spirit of the *Lysistrata*, where the women, despising their husbands' ability to rule, attempt to seize the government. *Iolanthe*, with its women characters who sway the British House of Lords over to their feminine opinions, recalls the role of the women in the *Ecclesiazusae*.

The theme of *The Pirates*, *Mikado*, *Pinafore*, which is the silliness of an overemphasis on class distinctions, also runs through Aristophanes' *Wasps*, *Knights*, *Peace*, and *Acharnians*. The Gilbert Utopian fantasy, entitled *The Utopian Limited*, is very much like the Aristophanic extravaganza, *Plutus*. The delicate Gilbertian dig at the weaknesses and failings of the English government found in the *Iolanthe* is but a weak echo of the bitter and vituperative attack of Aristophanes in the *Knights*.

In 1931 a great musical comedy took Broadway by storm. G. Kaufman wrote the words and the Gershwin brothers composed the music. Acclaimed by critics as America's most intelligent musical comedy and finest satire, *Of Thee I Sing* won the Pulitzer prize for that year. Its lyrics and melodies and setting furnished the background for a plot that subtly criticized the evils of American democracy and government. Humorously it showed how ordinary people are deceived and influenced by ruthless politicians and by political parties. Half-concealed by the music and humor are Kaufman's criticisms of politicians who are demagogues (Act I, Scene I), who deceive and fool the people by their oratory and crookedness. We hear him proclaim that honest men avoid a political career (Act I, Scene II), that the ordinary citizen is easily led by the wild and insincere promises of politicians (Act I, Scene I), that the politicians' emphasis on the past glories of their political party is the best way to make the citizens overlook the dishonesties of the present, and the shrewd politician always appeals to the heart and emotions, never to the intellect (Act I, Scene IV).

The very same theme and the very same criticisms roll like the continued beat of a drum throughout the boisterous humor of Aristophanes' *Knights*. This play, like *Of Thee I Sing*, attacks the politicians who flatter and deceive the people (1.45), who make promises never intended to be fulfilled (265-269), who keep the attention of the citizens off the present by recalling the benefits of the past (7.40), who ladle out the public funds for their own use (826). This play also satirizes the listlessness and foolishness of a democratic people who allow themselves to be so easily fooled by cheap gifts and wild promises. Both comedies have as their aim the desire to wake the people up, lest their democratic form of government slip away from their control. Both intimate definite plans of reform. Aristophanes is more bitter and more cynical than Kaufman, but the humorous scenes and dialogues, the general development of the plots in both are extraordinarily alike. Kaufman and Gershwin have caught the spirit of Aristophanes and modernized him.

These brief comparisons of modern and ancient musical

comedy show that the modern musical comedy has its roots deeply imbedded in the ancient. The essentials of the ancient are to be discovered in the modern. The union of ancient and modern musical comedy is very close.

### A Petition to Graduate Professors of English

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As an outsider to Latin, as far as teaching it is concerned, I am disturbed by some of the more ardent efforts to promote it, efforts not made by administrators or professors of English, with whom most of the power in this case lies, but only by the Latinists themselves. I am disturbed by the ludicrous anomalousness of the situation, and by my feeling that many of the devices for furthering the cause of Latin are ineffective, and perhaps even harmful to the cause.

During the 1945 Latin Week (by its very name an unworthy concession to common practices) students of Latin in many high schools gave assembly programs on its values. There were bulletin-board exhibits, displays of Latin-department newspapers, Roman banquets, "Don't Fence Me In" sung in Latin, and so on. The net result of all this, so far as I can see or anticipate, upon the initially unconvinced, the educators, schoolboard members, and county superintendents, is nil. I see no result affecting even the professors of English—which to me is proof positive that there can be none upon those who are less personally dependent upon the health and prestige of Latin study in the schools.

Without the tap on the shoulder, or the tug at the sleeve, administered by individuals on higher rungs of the administrative ladder than themselves, the persons in charge of schools and their curriculums will pay little heed to those pressures coming up unassisted from the workers in Latin, now (absurdly) a stepchild among subjects. And excessive attempts to catch the conscience and the understanding of educators and the public only deprive the students of precious time needed for direct application to the subject itself. If I were a teacher in the high schools I should not have the slightest enthusiasm for a "department paper," with its manifold demands so extraneous to the main business of language-learning.

As I wrote in April, 1941 ("To Accelerate the Language Stream," *Modern Language Journal*, p. 537):

Latin can surely survive on the strength of its solid, age-old claims. Pursuing the grooved type of conduct espoused by the various new subjects and activities tends to give it the special and detached character of these, which from the very nature of things in this case is not an asset, but an encumbrance. Latin does not, like the soul of Milton, dwell apart, but is basic for any and all forms of general culture, and nothing should be permitted to circumscribe its ideal setting in this regard. Leaving totally aside all narrow and narrowing "organization," it should maintain through thick and thin its old individual character of alliance with all the other agencies of mental development.

The necessary lifting of Latin teaching in the schools, in other words, must come from others than its practitioners. And in this connection I do not hesitate to say that I do not regard highly the record of professors of English in respect to their support of Latin in the secondary schools. They know that English in our country is suffering from the influences that operate to prevent

the early formal study of Latin. They know that the teachers of Latin in school and college are struggling against the slipshod opportunism of the times and the indifference of educators (themselves often poorly based in English) who would spoonfeed, "integrate," and "generalize" young people into educational self-sufficiency. But the professors of English (and I am thinking here mainly of the graduate professors, who are in excellent position to make common cause) do nothing at all, in any concerted way, to make their convictions of the essentiality of Latin known to educators (so-called) and other school authorities. Their occasional super-dignified references to the matter at meetings of the "high-brow" Modern Language Association never reach the proper destination, that is, the ears and eyes of those who actually direct the schools and furnish opinions on education to the great lay public.

I suppose that the average graduate professor of English (a busy man, it must be admitted) may think it beneath his dignity to write or talk upon anything so elementary and obvious as the essentiality of serious Latin for subsequent study of English language and English literature. I suppose indeed that he would draw many laughs from his colleagues if he showed excitement in print over something altogether taken for granted in graduate-English quarters. He is in general jealous, I suspect, of his reputation for letting nothing fall from his pen that does not call for scholarly nods and becks, or scholarly contradictions, from scholarly *confrères*.

Incidentally this same graduate professor, while in no sense helping in the main battle, is daily and hourly receiving benefits from writers in the ranks of the classicists. How many admirable articles I have read in classics journals showing the intimate linking and welding of Greek and Latin and English parts in language and literature, to say nothing of law, medicine, politics, science! Even if the matter were not one of self-defense, it would still be incumbent upon graduate professors of English to display a far better spirit of reciprocity than they have hitherto shown.

My plea to them is plain: that they make effective an immediate, active, and unremitting championship of Latin in the lower schools for all who aim at collegiate instruction in literature and language, as well as at distinction in the legal, medical, political, and general scientific world, a palpable and concrete championship, publicly concerted, and directed with unanimity and power at secondary-school officials and others in authority.

### The Father of Latin Hymnody

By SISTER MARY BERNARDINE, O.S.B.

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The importance of St. Ambrose as Bishop of Milan, as Hammer of the Arians, as author of dogmatical, exegetical, moral, and ascetical works, as a writer of sermons and letters, as a Father and Doctor of the Church, has somewhat eclipsed his significance as the "Father of Latin Hymnody." And yet, his achievements as a writer and teacher of Latin Church hymns have had a dominating influence throughout the centuries.

The practice of congregational singing introduced by Ambrose seemed almost the result of accident. For



months he had been pressed by the Arian Empress, Justina, and her persistent followers, to surrender to them the Portian Church with its sacred vessels. The Arians were determined in their demand for the basilica, but equally determined was Ambrose to preserve it for the flock under his care. The climax came on Palm Sunday, 386, when a horde of Gothic soldiers surrounded the edifice, clamoring for admittance and threatening to take possession as soon as the congregation departed. Ambrose urged the faithful to remain calmly where they were. To alleviate the fatigue and tedium of their vigil, he alternated his exhortations with the composition and singing of hymns.

St. Augustine gives us a graphic account of how Ambrose triumphed with equanimity over the impending disaster and succeeded in keeping his flock occupied and interested for hours:

The people of God were keeping watch in the Church ready to die with their bishop, Thy servant. Among them was my mother, living to pray, taking a leading part in the anxious vigil. I myself, as yet untouched by the fire of Thy Spirit, shared in the troubled alarm in the city. Then it was that the practice was begun of singing hymns and psalms, as was done in the Eastern provinces, to save the people from being completely worn down by weariness from mourning. From that day to this the custom has been retained by many, indeed, by nearly all Thy flocks, and is being imitated in the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup>

The singing of hymns to God is a practice almost as old as Christianity itself. The first Christians had their Doxologies, Alleluias, Hosannas, and, especially, the Kyrie Eleison. But it was not until about the fourth century that Christian hymn-writing was undertaken to counteract the activity of the heretics. St. Ephraem (d. 373), and St. Gregory Nazianzus (d. 389), wrote hymns in the East, and St. Ambrose, at about the same time, in the West.<sup>2</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers had made an earlier though unsuccessful attempt, his subject matter being too profound and intricate, his composition too tedious and prosaic to make a lasting impression.

Many factors contributed to the success and popularity of Ambrose's hymns. Their vigorous, austere simplicity, their emotional appeal, their economy of words, their simple rhythm, their poetic mysticism, and their dogmatic correctness, all reflect the mind of the great Doctor of the Church. The strength of his compositions lies in his direct plunge into the truth. He seemed to realize fully that the adequate answer to all questions can be found only in the mind of God. Simeon, in commenting upon his hymns, says, "They all have the character of deep, spontaneous feeling, flowing in a clear, rhythmical current, and show a more genuine literary feeling than the prose words."<sup>3</sup>

Trench, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, paid them this tribute:

Austere simplicity characterizes the hymns of Ambrose. . . . Only after a while one learns to feel the grandeur of this unadorned metre, and the profound, though it may have been more instinctive than conscious, wisdom of the poet in choosing it; or to appreciate that the noble confidence in the surpassing interest in his theme which has rendered him indifferent to any but its simplest setting forth. It is as though building an altar to the living God, he would observe the Levitical precepts and rear it of unhewn stones, upon which no tool has been lifted. The great objects of faith in their simplest expressions are felt by him so sufficient to stir all the deepest affections of heart, that any at-

tempt to dress them, to array them in living language, were merely superfluous. The passion is there, but it is latent and repressed, a fire burning inwardly, the glow of an austere enthusiasm, which reveals itself indeed, but not to every careless beholder. Nor do we presently fail to observe how truly these poems belong to their time and to the circumstances under which they were produced, how suitably the faith which was in actual conflict with, and was just triumphing over, the powers of this world, found its utterance in hymns such as these, wherein no softness, perhaps little tenderness; but rock-like firmness, the old Roman stoicism transmuted and glorified into that nobler Christian courage which encountered and at length overcame the world.<sup>4</sup>

Blume compared the hymns of Ambrose with those of Prudentius: "Ambrose's hymns, like the old Roman dome, impress us by their classical dignity and weight, while Prudentius', like the Gothic cathedral, elevate our souls by the richness of their form and the bold flights of his fancy."<sup>5</sup>

Not all the hymns, however, called *Ambrosian* flowed from the pen of Ambrose. The term may indicate either that the hymns were at one time considered his compositions, or that they imitate his style, metre, or form. Ambrose's busy life evidently prevented his giving full scope to his poetic genius. He set the pattern and provided the model; others imitated him. His iambic dimeter, a form which readily lends itself to musical setting, was easy to construct and memorize, and, being adaptable to all kinds of subjects, it soon became a favorite for liturgical hymns.

Dreves,<sup>6</sup> an eminent hymnologist who, in conjunction with Blume, made a careful study of early hymnaries, considers fourteen hymns the genuine work of St. Ambrose: *Aeterne Rerum Conditor*; *Deus Creator Omnium*; *Illuminans Altissimus*; *Veni Redemptor Gentium*; *Jam Surgit Hora Tertia*; *Aeterna Christi Munera*; *Agnes Beatae Virginis*; *Amore Christi Nobilis*; *Apostolorum Passio*; *Apostolorum Supparem*; *Grates Tibi, Jesu, Novas*; *Hic Est Dies Verus Dei*; *Splendor Paternae Glorae*; *Victor, Nabor, Felix, Pii*.

A number of others he lists as doubtful, notably those of the three morning hours: *Nunc, Sancte Nobis Spiritus*; *Rector Potens, Verax Deus*; *Rerum Deus Tenax Vigor*.

Of these, and perhaps of all the hymns in the Breviary today, the *Aeterne Rerum Conditor* is the most beautiful. It is used in Sunday Lauds from the Octave of the Epiphany until the first Sunday of Lent, and from the Sunday nearest the Kalends of October until Advent. Because it so well illustrates the connection between the content and the hour for the recitation of Lauds, we are giving the entire hymn here:

Aeterne rerum Conditor  
Noctem diemque qui regis,  
Et temporum das tempora,  
Ut alleves fastidium.

Nocturna lux vianibus  
A nocte noctem segregans,  
Praeco diei jam sonat,  
Jubarque solis evocat.

Hoc excitatus lucifer  
Solvit polum caligine:  
Hoc omnis errorum cohors  
Viam nocendi deserit.

Hoc nauta vires colligit,  
Pontique mitescent freta:  
Hoc, ipsa petra Ecclesiae,  
Canente, culpam diluit.

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions* 9.7. <sup>2</sup> Clemens Blume, S. J., "Hymnody and Hymnology," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 7:596-604. <sup>3</sup> G. A. Simeon, *Latin Literature from Ennius to Boethius*. London, 1883. 2205.

<sup>4</sup> R. C. Trench, *Sacred Latin Poetry*. London, 1874. Pp. 87-89. <sup>5</sup> *op. cit.* <sup>6</sup> G. M. Dreves, S. J., and C. Blume, S. J., *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*. Leipzig, 1886-.

Surgamus ergo strenue:  
Gallus jacentes excitat,  
Et somnolentos increpat,  
Gallus negantes arguit.

Gallo canente spes redit,  
Aegris salus refunditur,  
Mucro latronis conditur,  
Lapsis fides revertitur.

Jesu labantes respice,  
Et nos videndo corrige:  
Si respicis, labes cadunt  
Fletuque culpa solvitur.

Tu lux refulge sensibus  
Mentisque somnum discute:  
Te nostra vox primum sonet,  
Et vota solvamus tibi.

Its eighteen English translations, not to mention those in other languages, attest its popularity. If there were any question concerning its authenticity it would be dispelled by this reference of St. Augustine:

... in quo (sc. libro contra epist. Donati) dixi in quodam loco de apostolo Petro, quod in illo tamquam in petra fundata sit ecclesia; qui sensus etiam cantatur ore multorum in versibus beatissimi Ambrosii, ubi de gallo gallinaceo ait: hoc ipsa petra ecclesiae canente culpam diluit.<sup>7</sup>

Ambrose himself makes the following comment:

Est etiam galli cantus suavis in noctibus, nec solum suavis sed etiam utilis; qui quasi bonus cohabitator et dormientem excitat et sollicitum admonet et vianem solatur, processum noctis canora voce protestans. Hoc canente latro suas relinquit insidias, hoc ipse lucifer excitatus oritur caelumque inluminat; hoc canente maestitiam trepidus nauta deponit, omnisque crebro vespertinis flatibus excitata tempestas et procella mitescit; hoc devotus affectus exsilit ad precandum, legendo quoque munus instaurat; hoc postremo canente ipse ecclesiae petra culpam suam diluit, quam priusquam gallus cantaret negando contraxerat. Istius cantu spes omnibus redit, aegri relevatur incommodum, minuitur dolor vulnerum, febrium flagrantia mitigatur, revertitur fides lapsa, Jesus titubantes respicit, errantes corrigit. Denique respexit Petrum et statim error abscessit; pulsa est negatio, secuta confessio.<sup>8</sup>

Although entitled "O Eternal Creator of the World," the hymn is really a "Song at Cockerow," a simple, homely topic, but one of deep religious significance. Monsignor Henry,<sup>9</sup> has remarked that a familiarity with its literal meaning, with its inner mystical sense, with its classical neatness and nicety of phrase, with its careful and artistic distribution of invocation, will convince the reader that he is face to face with perhaps the finest example of poetic mysticism to be found in the Office of the Church.

The cock, as the herald of dawn, dominates the hymn. His non-melodious, though intense, crowing summons the new day and calls all earth's creatures, refreshed, to their appointed tasks. But beneath the commonplace one readily recognizes the mystical significance—man, a weary wayfarer on life's journey, is restored and incited to renewed spiritual life by the supernatural light of divine grace. St. Peter, head of the Church, at the cock's crowing recalled his triple denial and wept over it; the repentant sinner begs for a look of the gentle Christ to wash away the stains of his guilt. Trench says<sup>10</sup> that, for the early Christian, the cock's crowing had a mystical significance. It reminded him that the night was far spent and that day was at hand. In the Middle Ages,

therefore, the cock became the standing emblem of the preacher of God's word. The heathen idea that the lion could not bear the sight of the cock easily adapted itself to this new symbolism. Satan, the roaring lion (*I Peter* 5.8), fled away terrified at the faithful preaching of the word of God. Nor did it pass unnoticed that this bird, clapping its wings upon its sides, first rouses itself, before it seeks to rouse others.

The use of the Latin hymns of St. Ambrose and his imitators spread rapidly from Milan throughout the West, and their introduction into the Divine Office by St. Benedict (480-543) during the heyday of monastic expansion further contributed to their permanence.

Hymnody continued to prosper until the twelfth century and reached its zenith in the numerous and beautiful compositions of Adam of St. Victor (d. 1142). It still flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but its creativeness continued slowly to decrease. The divers religious and political entanglements of the time caused its gradual decline, and the final deathblow came with the revision of the Breviary under Pope Urban VIII (1632), when the medieval rhythmical hymns were forced into a more classical mold by means of so-called corrections. After that, the hymnody of the Middle Ages became a historical monument, bearing evidence to the artistic skill and the deep religious life of our forebears.<sup>11</sup>

Only during the last century did an awakened interest in hymnody bring with it a greater appreciation for St. Ambrose, its Latin Father.

<sup>11</sup> Blume, *op. cit.*

## Saint Louis University and the CLASSICS

*Saint Louis University has believed in classical education since its inception as a secondary school in 1818.*

*Its Department* of Classical Languages is fully sympathetic with the great tradition and convinced of the place of the classics in our changing world.

*Its ideals* envision a combination of the best objectives of modern classical research, along with the timeless aims of genuinely humane education.

*Its courses* in classical languages look to the needs and interests both of students in the undergraduate schools and of specialists-in-training in the graduate school.

<sup>7</sup> *Retractiones* 1.21. <sup>8</sup> *Hexameron* 5.88. <sup>9</sup> Msgr. H. Henry, "Aeternae Rerum Conditor." *American Ecclesiastical Review*, October, 1896. <sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 244.



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